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Conferences
Devoted to Improving Ontario's Crops

Govt Section 5th floor

LAND USE CONFERENCE

DECEMBER 12—13
1972

Proceedings

WELCOME TO LAND USE CONFERENCE

The Hon. Wm. A. Stewart

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WELCOME TO CONFERENCE

By The Honourable Wm. A. Stewart,
Minister of Agriculture and Food for the Province of Ontario.

I welcome the opportunity to bring you greetings from the Premier of Ontario, The Honourable William Davis and the Government of Ontario and to extend congratulations to the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association for the concept of this Conference. I wonder sometimes if we completely grasp the importance and the significance of such a Conference.

I note with interest that the press are here. This to me is a rare opportunity for them to listen to what the people who are really affected by land use in the Province are thinking about the present and the future. I hope they will inform the public of the results of this Conference as I'm sure the public wants to be informed today.

One can't help but be impressed with the impact of Mr. McLaughlin's information on the future of this great province of ours and of our country. I must say that there are a great many who will accept the challenge of the opportunities that are ahead for entirely new concepts.

So I say to you quite frankly that in our Resource Policy Field which is headed by The Honourable Mr. Lawrence and to which belong six Provincial Ministries, that is the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Industry and Tourism, the Ministry of Transportation and Communication and the Ministry of Labour, there is a new approach. All are interested

in dealing with our resources as a policy group, and have an input into every decision that is made in any one of those Ministries on a group basis, before it is referred to the Policy and Priorities Board of the Cabinet, and to the Cabinet itself. It seems to me to be a new approach to the opportunities that face us as we deal with the most important aspects of our entire province, and that is its natural resources in all kinds and all aspects.

I have a feeling that after all of the studies that have been made, all of us are now asking ourselves when is the time for action to come and is this now the time. To me these studies lead us now to the point of decision. It is a decision that I don't think should be made entirely by Queen's Park or by Ottawa or necessarily by local Municipal Government. At the same time local Municipal Government really must assume a tremendous responsibility in the implementation of land use planning but it seems to me that we have to approach it in proper perspective. I believe quite frankly that there is a place for continued development of agriculture and its continued industry in this province. However, we also must recognize that there has to be a place for lands devoted to uses such as recreation, forestry, conservation with all of these things coordinated to yield and improve the quality of life for all our people, not just for us who are farmers.

I think that the use of land as it may evolve at this Conference and during further discussions must be tied to the

economic viability of the use to be made of the land. What is really meant by that? As I see it, and I have been closely associated with reports that have come in on various programs of land use planning throughout Ontario, such as the Gertler Report, the Chudleigh Report on the Niagara fruit lands, and a good many others, one has to recognize basic economics. That must surely be the prime consideration. In my humble opinion as a farmer I see little use of somebody saying to me as a land owner that my land must be for ever and a day designated for agricultural production unless that agricultural production will yield me a standard of living that is comparable to other segments of society and in which I can raise my family and hope that they will enjoy the benefits that others will. Surely that must be a basic.

There are those who suggest that Government at every level, particularly Provincial Governments, should have implemented land use plans in the Niagara Peninsula based on the studies that have been done. Sure the Provincial Government could have moved in and it could have said to the Municipalities this land will be designated for agricultural production. But what are we to say to the farmers who would be growing the fruit on that land when they see imports of foreign fruit coming into this country in unlimited quantity and jerking the rug out from under them. Surely, it only makes sense that we as Federal, Provincial and local Governments must work together to the mutual advantage of all concerned and I mean that quite sincerely.

In this connection you would be interested to know that I have already had personal discussions with the new Minister of

Agriculture for Canada along this very line because I believe unless we assume our respective responsibilities at whatever level of Government is appropriate that we could be headed for real trouble in the future.

I think as well that the second important point to consider in this matter of land use designation, is that there is realistic assessment values attached to that farm land or recreational land as the case may be, based on soil quality and climatic conditions in which that area is located. To me it is not good enough that we use for establishing market value for assessment purposes individual sales of land that may be made to people in the urban shadow. They may see a little farm and they say that farm suits us, my wife likes the view from the kitchen window and I don't care what the price is, we're going to own it. To me that's not realistic values for agricultural production. I think we have to assess on soil quality and climatic conditions.

I think a third point that should be taken into consideration when we're talking about land use planning, is a realistic farm credit policy. Questions have been asked as to whether the time has come for us to consider methods of ownership other than private ownership of land. I suppose that being a fifth generation of people who came to this country because they wanted to own land, I am not unlike most people here who feel and sense the pride of ownership in land. But I have to question myself when I talk to the graduates of our Agricultural Colleges across the length and breadth of the province, young people who have an agricultural background, young people who would make outstanding

farmers because they have the feel of the land. They say to me the time has come when we ask ourselves why should we indebt ourselves and our families to a lifetime of having our nose up against an economic grindstone that requires us to pay on an annual basis on a debt load that no one else in our graduating class is expected to carry in order that we can produce food for this country. And I think they have a point.

What is the answer? There are many offers of suggestions that have been made and it seems to me that in these discussion groups that you are having at this Conference, may emerge some ideas that Government at every level will be anxious to hear, and that Government at every level will try to implement if they bear common sense and a practical solution to one of the greatest problems that faces us today.

I propose that those of us fortunate enough to be here will have participated in the most historic type of Conference that has ever been called in the Province of Ontario. We will wish you well.



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